

# **THE PISCATAQUA RIVER ITS MANY USES**

**February 23, 2007**

**Captain Martin Pring  
Captain Samuel de Champlain  
Captain John Smith**

**You may not recognize all of these names but surly you will recognize at least one. These are the first Europeans to write of New England in the early 1600s. They viewed this land, and in particular the Piscataqua River, as a place of abundant natural resources, so much so that one particular stretch of the Piscataqua was named “Strawberry Banke,” which included “Spring Hill.”**

**The Piscataqua Region consists of some 120 square miles including the Winnicut, Squamscott, Lampery, Oyster, Bellamy, Cocheco and Salmon Falls Rivers, most connecting through Great Bay and Little Bay, but all flow through the mighty Piscataqua to reach the sea.**

**Professor Jeff Bolster states in his excellent book, “Cross-Grained and Wily Waters,” and I quote, “Residents no longer say they are “of Piscataqua” as did seventeenth century settlers. References to “Portsmouth,” “Kittery,” “Durham,” or “Seacoast New Hampshire” have replaced “Piscataqua” as a place in our minds.**

**In 1767 the Crown of England appointed the last royal governor of the colony of New Hampshire, John Wentworth and by 1790 the shipping and fishing industry of the region made Portsmouth the 14<sup>th</sup> largest city in the country. However, the development of roads and the rail road shifted the focus away from the waters.**

**I dare say today, that in preparation for this discussion, I became aware that the fundamental components of life in the Piscataqua Region have not changed so much. It is an attractive, comfortable place to live, where one may indulge in a multitude of recreational resources (boating and sport fishing), some make a living by fishing and some of us make our way in the shipping industry.**

## **RECREATION**

**The desire to spend leisure time on the waters of the Piscataqua, has never been more evident than today. In our present economy and with the affordable recreational equipment available, anyone can play on the Piscataqua River. The Port office, which manages the mooring program, has seen the expanded recreational uses on the river. The number of mooring permits and mooring waitlist applications has increased substantially. Mooring areas have expanded and the uses of the moorings have diversified.**

**When I came to work at the Port in 1995 there were approximately 1,100 mooring permits and 400 names on the waitlist. Today, the Port has issued over 1,600 mooring permits annually and there are over 600 names on the waitlist. Less than 10% of those permits are for commercial use moorings. The Harbor Masters have observed that there are a number of moorings in the Little Bay and Great Bay area that have become destinations. Boaters, who keep their vessel at a dock or marina, are utilizing the mooring for a picnic location and even for an overnight lay-over.**

**The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department maintains several “Access to Public Waters” areas. Some of these facilities accommodate trailered boats with motors and others are “car top” launch ramps. There are Fish and Game launch areas in New Castle, on the Bellamy River, Adam’s Point in Durham, Sandy Point in Stratham and Chapman’s Landing in Newfields. Additionally every municipality of the Piscataqua Region has a launch ramp of some kind.**

**The kayak has brought many people to the waters of the Piscataqua River. My own personal experience with the kayak began when I worked in Alaska. Today, my whole family enjoys a safe, affordable water sport. Putting in at Chapman’s Landing and paddling into the marsh to observe nesting Osprey or exploring the protected waters of the back channel behind New Castle. If the weather is good you will always encounter another boater enjoying this natural resource.**

## **COMMERCIAL FISHING**

**Commercial fishing in the Piscataqua River has certainly changed since the first settlers came to the region. None the less, commercial fishing is active and is a high priority for the Port. New Hampshire Law mandates that the Port foster and stimulate the commercial fishing industry.**

**The Port manages the Commercial Fish Pier on Pierce Island in Portsmouth. That facility accommodates approximately 40 fishing vessels engaged in a variety of species. There are gill net boats, lobster boats, draggers for fin fish, shrimp and scallops.**

**Because of regulatory restrictions, many boats are engaged in multiple fisheries. For example, a lobster boat may drag scallops in the winter. Some gill net vessels may change to the shrimp fishery when their days at sea have been used and there are some vessels that have the ability to switch between several fisheries in order that they may survive, economically. This is a testament to the commitment that these men and woman have made to become and stay a fisherman. The Portsmouth Commercial Fish Pier is a facility established and maintained to support that commitment.**

**But the fish pier is primarily a facility that services vessels that fish out to sea and only transit the Piscataqua River to reach that destination. The buildings and the concession on the fish pier are leased to the Portsmouth Fishermen's Cooperative. Formed in the early 1980s, by the fishermen themselves, the coop's mission is to provide the shore side services so the product can reach the market and the fishermen have control over the quality of that product.**

**The term "Co-Op" is truly put into play at the fish pier. Made up of fin fishermen, the co-op assists the other fishermen on the dock. A lobster fisherman may use the co-op fork lift to move a piece of equipment or load his truck. There is always an extra set of hands to help another.**

**I will not attempt to comment on the state of any fishery since that is not my area of expertise but I would be remiss if I didn't state that there is a commercial lobster fishery right in the Piscataqua River.**

## **SHIPPING**

The main, deep water shipping channel of the Piscataqua River has become known as the “Port of New Hampshire” because it is the only deep water port in the state and although the channel is shared by the State of Maine, the shipping industry is located solely in the State of New Hampshire. The activities of the Port of New Hampshire are large and complex. Nature has given the Port a deep water harbor and river, which has made Portsmouth Harbor and the Piscataqua River not only one of the oldest working ports in the United States, but the closest year round, ice free port to Europe.

Statistics for the calendar year 2006, show that the volume of shipping on the Piscataqua to be:

- 7,608,034 DWT of ships transited the River.
- 4,468,601 MT of cargo was imported through the River.
- 375,960 MT of cargo was exported through the River.

On the average, 5 million metric tons of cargo, transit the Piscataqua River annually. Some of the companies that handle these cargos are:

### **Sprague Energy, River Road Terminal**

#2 Fuel Oil, Diesel Fuel, Aircraft Jet Fuel, Kerosene, Dry Bulk, Cement, Gypsum, Salt, Chemicals, Tallow and Asphalt.

### **Sprague Energy and Sea 3, Avery Lane Terminal**

LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas), Asphalt and Gasoline.

### **Tyco Newington**

Undersea, fiber optic telecommunications and surveillance cable.

### **Public Service of NH and Sprague Energy, Shiller Station Terminal**

#4 and #6 Fuel Oil and Coal.

### **National Gypsum Co. and Irving Oil Terminal**

Gypsum, #2 Fuel Oil, Diesel Fuel and Kerosene.

**Granite State Minerals**  
**Road Salt**

**State of New Hampshire, Market Street Marine Terminal**

**The only public access, general cargo terminal on the Piscataqua River. Scrap Metal, Road Salt, Machinery, Power Plant Components, construction Materials. The Terminal provides support services to vessels calling to the other terminals on the River as well as providing a portal to the sea for companies who may need, from time to time, to ship cargo/merchandise, to and from New Hampshire, that other wise would not be able to do so. *(Give some examples)***

**Keeping shipping active on the Piscataqua River is a collaborative effort and this venue today is an example of that type of effort.**

**Communication between the stake holders of this industry is the life line that keeps the flow of commerce constant and there is a co-dependency.**

**Not a single ship would transit the Piscataqua River if it were not for the professionals for the Portsmouth Pilots Association. The Pilots are licensed by the United States Coast Guard as Federal Pilots but are also licensed by the State of New Hampshire as State Pilots. The State of New Hampshire, through the Division of Ports and Harbors, has set criteria for licensing pilots of the Piscataqua River based on the unique topography and operating characteristics of the River. I do not believe that a single person in this room today not would want only the highest trained professional with first hand experience, guiding an LPG tanker past your front window.**

**The Army Corps of Engineers conducts regular condition surveys of the shipping channel. Those surveys are used by the pilots as they plan their transits and the pilots provide feedback to the Corps on what they are experiencing and the effect that the channel conditions have on ship handling.**

**Terminal operators give input on the effect that channel limitations would or do have on their business.**

**Solutions are discussed. Plans are formulated. Environmental impacts are studied. And then there is all important “Funding” component of a project. And for that we turn to our Congressional delegation and their staff.**

**The flow of merchandise and good through the Piscataqua River is of vital importance to everyone and I thank you for your interest and involvement by coming today.**